

News Release



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MSHA launches comprehensive action plan to tackle black lung *Efforts include education, enhanced enforcement, training, and rulemaking*

BECKLEY, W.Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) announced today a multifaceted, comprehensive strategy to end new cases of black lung among the nation’s coal miners. Black lung is a collection of debilitating and potentially fatal diseases from respirable coal mine dust exposure. These diseases have been on the rise in recent years. MSHA’s initiative to curb black lung will include focused enforcement, targeted education and training, rulemaking, and collaboration with stakeholders.

“The Department of Labor is absolutely committed to ending black lung disease,” said Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis. “We will use all the tools necessary to control dust in coal mines and reduce the risk of disease to our nation’s coal miners.”

“While considerable progress has been made in reducing miners’ exposure to respirable coal mine dust, miners continue to develop black lung and silicosis,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant labor secretary for mine safety and health. “Having a comprehensive strategy is essential to tackle the occurrence of this highly preventable condition.

“I am pleased that the National Mining Association, the United Mine Workers of America and the Bituminous Coal Operators Association have announced their support of our goal to end black lung once and for all,” added Main.

Based on recent data from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), cases of black lung are increasing among the nation’s coal miners. Even younger miners are showing evidence of advanced and debilitating lung disease from excessive dust exposure.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, over 10,000 miners have died from black lung over the last decade. The federal government has paid out over \$44 billion in compensation for miners totally disabled by black lung since 1970, according to the Labor Department’s Office of Workers’ Compensation.

The major components of MSHA’s action plan are described below:

MSHA will hold four public informational events in coalfield communities. In addition to today’s kickoff in Beckley, W.Va., these events will take place Dec. 7 in Washington, Pa.; Dec. 10 in Lebanon, Va.; and Dec. 11 in Frankfort, Ky.

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MSHA is disseminating new materials on a variety of dust-related topics, including black lung, controlling respirable dust, on-shift examinations, and controlling exposure to coal mine dust containing quartz and exposure at surface mine facilities. MSHA will also post additional reports, educational materials and resources on its “End Black Lung” Web page at <http://www.msha.gov>.

MSHA’s outreach efforts include a series of regional one-day workshops jointly sponsored with NIOSH. “Best Practices for Controlling Respirable Dust in Coal Mines” will bring together groups of dust control experts to share their knowledge and experience on practical dust control tools and techniques to prevent disabling occupational lung disease in coal miners. The first workshop was held at the Mine Health and Safety Academy last month. Others are scheduled for March 2010 in Birmingham, Ala.; April 2010 in Evansville, Ind.; and June 2010 in Grand Junction, Colo.

During the week of Dec. 7, MSHA will initiate its Dust Sweep, when every coal mine inspector will dedicate a part of each inspection to health-related activities and apply the lessons learned during the “Special Dust Emphasis Inspection Program” that took place earlier this year. Based on these lessons learned, MSHA will review the quality of dust controls stipulated in approved ventilation plans—focusing on the primacy of engineering controls—and evaluate respirable dust practices during regular inspections. MSHA training specialists will monitor the quality of training provided by industry personnel on the risks of black lung and silicosis to miners and prevention methods.

MSHA’s rulemaking agenda includes work on a final rule concerning the approval of coal mine dust personal monitors. The rule would update approval requirements for existing monitors and establish criteria for approval of a new type of technology, the “continuous personal dust monitor (CPDM),” which reports exposure to dust levels continuously during a work shift. MSHA is considering rulemaking on the recommendations in the NIOSH Criteria Document and the Secretary of Labor’s Advisory Committee on the Elimination of Pneumoconiosis Among Coal Mine Workers. Some of the recommendations include lowering the level of exposure to coal mine dust, developing a separate exposure level for coal mine dust and silica, and using the CPDM to identify dust exposure and, as appropriate, for compliance.

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